8 KENTUCKY STREET/
COSMOPOLITAN HOTEL SITE

Petaluma, California

HISTORIC RESOURCE REPORT

Prepared by

Painter Preservation & Planning
Petaluma, California

Diana Painter PhD

Prepared for

Angela De Carli &
The City of Petaluma

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Petaluma, California

SUMMARY

Conclusions and Recommendations

The wall on the 8 Kentucky Street/Cosmopolitan site is defined under National Register criteria as a ruin, and as such is considered a site for purposes of this analysis. The wall and associated features represent the remaining, visible portion of the Gervasoni Building, which was located on the site from approximately 1910 to 1952. It was not surveyed as part of the historic survey developed for the Petaluma Downtown Commercial District National Register Historic District.

The 8 Kentucky Street site is the original location of the 1866 Cosmopolitan Hotel, which catered to a working class clientele in early Petaluma, including lodgings and services such as a barber and cobbler. The three-story, wood frame hotel burned down some time between 1910 and 1919. It was replaced with the one-story brick masonry Gervasoni Building, which had two storefronts and a two-story store room to the rear.

This structure burned in 1952, leaving the frame of the storefront (since removed), the rear wall, and the southwest party wall with the LanMart Building. It has been used as a parking lot in recent years. It was also the site for the well-known scene in the 1973 movie American Graffiti in which the undercarriage of a police car was torn out. This scene was given even more notoriety when it replayed on the screen in the 1980 movie Airplane.

The site is referred to in historic and contemporary history texts as the Cosmopolitan Hotel. The hotel developed concurrently with other commercial businesses on the block at that time, including the Centennial Block next door (now the LanMart Building). It was one of a group of hotels that developed during Petaluma's early period of growth and prosperity to serve the burgeoning city. This is the building with which the site is most closely associated. It is not associated in historic texts, photographs and drawings with the newer Gervasoni Building.

The site, which is how this resource is defined, is most closely associated with Criteria A of the National Register of Historic Places and the equivalent Criteria 1 of the California Register of Historic Resources. This criterion states that the resource must be associated with broad patterns of national, state or local history in order to be considered significant. This report finds that the site is ***not*** eligible for either the National or State Register under

this criterion, as the remnant remaining on the site is not from the building for which the site was best known, the Cosmopolitan Hotel, but the later and lesser known Gervasoni

Building. Nonetheless, the wall is an attractive urban design feature of the downtown area that is a visible reminder of earlier construction methods and materials.

1. INTRODUCTION

A. *Purpose of Report*

This Historic Resource Report was requested by the City of Petaluma when the owner of the property, Angela De Carli, inquired about demolishing the wall on this site in order to develop a larger parking lot. The site is currently used as a parking lot and the brick masonry wall on the site divides it into two parts. This property is within the area surveyed for the Petaluma Commercial Historic District, but was not the subject of a survey itself. As a result, the site has not been surveyed in the past. This report will help inform the City and others in making decisions about the future of this site.

Angela De Carli retained Painter Preservation & Planning to document the history of the site and evaluate its historic significance. Diana J. Painter of Painter Preservation & Planning undertook this work. Ms. Painter is a qualified architectural historian as defined in the Code of Federal Regulations, 36 CFR Part 61. She holds a PhD in Architecture in Research and a Masters Degree in Urban Planning, and has 25 years of professional experience in urban design and historic preservation. She is listed as an architectural historian on the roster of consultants on file with the State of California Office of Historic Preservation's Northwest Information Center at Sonoma State University in Rohnert Park.

B. *Research Methodology*

Preparation of this report involved consultation with staff of the Petaluma Regional Library History Room and the Sonoma Petaluma Historical Museum and Library. Local history sources consulted include Adair Heig's *History of Petaluma, A California River Town*; Simone Wilson's *Petaluma, California*; and articles from the *Argus-Courier*. General architectural resources include Cyril M. Harris' *American Architecture* and Richard Longstreth's *The Buildings of Main Street.*

Primary source research consisted of the following:

- Two site visits were conducted in September 2004 and photographs taken for documentation of the site as it exists today.
- Sanborn Fire Insurance maps were consulted to document the site as it existed in the past.
- Historic photographs, maps and illustrations were consulted for past building information.
- City directories and newspaper articles were consulted for information about previous owners and tenants.
- An interview was conducted with Rich De Carli, whose family has owned the site for many years.

2. PROPERTY DESCRIPTION

A. Location and Land Use

The wall at 8 Kentucky Street is located within a gravel parking lot that extends from Petaluma Blvd. North (originally Main Street) to Kentucky Street. The lot itself is used for reserved parking. The most recent addresses for the Petaluma Blvd. North side of the block were 27 and 29 Petaluma Blvd. North, and 31 and 33 Petaluma Blvd. North. The parcel is addressed from the Kentucky Street side today.

The parcel is located just east of the curve of the block, which results from two colliding grids in Petaluma's street pattern *(see Figure 2).* It occurs at the point where a short frontage street departs from Petaluma Blvd. North to serve four parcels south of Center Park. The parcel on which the building is located is APN 008-053-006. The neighboring property at APN 008-053-005, the site of the LanMart Building, is under the same ownership.

B. Architectural Description

The wall remaining at 8 Kentucky Street is essentially the back wall of a structure that was built some time between 1910 and 1919. It is approximately 24 feet high, 12 inches deep at the base, and extends from the McNear Building on the east to the LanMart Building on the west. It is located at approximately the two-thirds point in the lot; in other words, two thirds of the depth of the lot is on the Petaluma Blvd. North side and one third is on the Kentucky Street side *(see Figure 2).*

The upper lot slopes slightly from the south end down to the wall. The lower lot is nearly level. The upper lot is gravel and asphalt. The lower lot, which is where the Gervasoni Building was located, is a combination of concrete and gravel. At the wall two sets of concrete stairs, one from the east and one from the west, extend from the upper to lower lot level. They have two steps each and meet at a landing at the door level. There is a metal rail on the south side of the stairs.

The wall is a load-bearing brick masonry wall. There is a narrow brick coping at the top of the wall which steps slightly in the center. There are two door openings and seven window openings, all of which feature a shallow brick arch. The window sash and door jambs are wood. Viewed from the Kentucky Street side, one door is located almost adjacent to the LanMart Building wall, and there is a paired set of what were double-hung windows to its right. Near the center of the wall is another double-hung window of medium width. Above this, at what appears to have been the mezzanine level, is a wider arched opening with narrow vertical metal bars. This appears to have been a fixed window. Flanking the door on the right hand side of the wall are two windows, a narrow double-hung window opening to the left, and a wider window to the right. To the right of

this ensemble is another narrow double-hung window, close to the wall of the McNear Building.

The party wall of the southwest corner of the building is still extent. It is only one brick deep, which indicates that it was not a structural wall, but was using the LanMart Building wall or another means for structural support. There is no vestige of a wall on the McNear Building side. It is not clear whether this same condition occurred on this side of the building. In the party wall are voids where floor joists would have been located. The joists are at the approximate level of the arch of the door opening adjacent to it. This and the overall floor-to-ceiling height of the store room at the lower and mezzanine level suggests that ceiling heights were relatively low.

To the rear or upper portion of the lot along Kentucky Street, the lot abuts the McNear Building, which is faced with a stone rubble wall at the lower level. It appears to be finished with stucco at the upper level. According to an article written at the time, the McNear Building was steel and brick, so this may be a stucco-finished brick wall.[1] In the southeast corner of this lot is another low rubble wall with a stairwell to a shop in the basement at this corner of the McNear Building. At the rear lot on the west side is the brick wall of the Gross Building, which was built in the 1930s.

C. Urban Context

The 8 Kentucky Street site is an anomaly within this block today, which features one-to-three story buildings developed primarily between the 1870s and 1930s. Many of the structures in the block are part of Petaluma's renowned collection of cast iron-front buildings. When the Cosmopolitan Hotel was extant, the curvature of the block made the building visible from both east and west as you traveled along Main Street, providing a dramatic focal point in the downtown and a backdrop for parades and other civic activities.

Today the void created by the open parking lot is actually not highly visible when traveling east or west along Petaluma Blvd. North or Kentucky Street. The parking area and the wall are mainly visible when faced directly from either street. While the wall itself is an attractive feature in the urban landscape, it is also not highly visible because it is placed near the center of the lot, between two buildings. Today the central doorway that exists in the wall funnels pedestrian traffic from Kentucky Street to Petaluma Blvd. North. It is visual reminder of an earlier time, when a building existed at this location and when brick masonry and arched windows were a common means of construction.

[1] *The Petaluma Argus*, May 17, 1911, 1.

3. REGULATIONS AND CRITERIA FOR EVALUATION

A. *Definition of Resource Type*

The National Register of Historic Places includes properties in the following classifications: buildings, sites, districts, structures, or objects. A structure that has lost its historic configuration or pattern of organization through deterioration or demolition is usually considered a ruin, and is categorized as a site.[2] A site is defined as follows:

> *A site is the location of a significant event, a prehistoric or historic occupation or activity, or a building or structure, whether standing, ruined, or vanished, where the location itself possesses historic, cultural, or archaeological value regardless of the value of any existing structure.* [3]

B. *California Environmental Quality Act*

Under CEQA, a project that results in a substantial adverse change in the significance of a historic resource is a project that may have a significant adverse effect on the environment.[4] CEQA defines substantial adverse change as the physical demolition, destruction, relocation, or alteration of the resource or its immediate surroundings such that the significance of the resource is materially altered.[5] Additionally, no project that may cause a substantial adverse change in the significance of a historic resource is exempt from CEQA.[6]

Under CEQA, a resource is considered historically significant "if the resource meets the criteria for listing on the California Register. . . ."[7] However, it may also be considered a historic resource if it has been included on a local register of historic resources; if it has been identified as significant in a previous survey; or if the local agency believes it to be a historic resource, based on substantial evidence:

> *. . . a resource does not need to have been identified previously either through listing or survey to be considered significant under CEQA. In addition to assessing whether a historical resource is potentially impacted by a proposed project are listed or have been identified in a survey process, lead agencies have a responsibility to evaluate them against the California Register criteria prior to making a finding as to the proposed project's impacts to historical resources.*[8]

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[2] *How to Apply the National Register Criteria for Evaluation, National Register Bulletin* 15, 4.
[3] _____, 5.
[4] CEQA Statues 21084.1.
[5] CEQA Guidelines 15064.5.
[6] CEQA Statutes 21084e.
[7] Title 14 California Code of Regulations 15064.5 (3).
[8] PRC 21084.1, 14 CCR 15064.5(3).

C. *National Register of Historic Places Evaluation Criteria*

The historic significance or information potential of a site is evaluated for the National Register of Historic Places in the same way that any other resource is evaluated: through the application of the Criteria of Evaluation. In order to be determined eligible for listing on the National Register, a historic resource must meet one or more of the following four criteria:

1. It is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history; or

2. It is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past; or

3. It embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, region, or method of construction, or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction; or

4. It has yielded, or may be likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.[9]

D. *California Register of Historical Resources Evaluation Criteria*

Additionally, a resource may be considered significant at the local, state, or national level and therefore eligible for listing on the California Register of Historical Resources if it meets one or more of the following criteria:

1. Associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of local or regional history or the cultural heritage of California or the United States.

2. Associated with the lives of persons important to local, California or national history.

3. Embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, region or method of construction or represents the work of a master or possesses high artistic values.

4. Has yielded, or has the potential to yield, information important to the prehistory or history of the local area, California or the nation.[10]

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[9] *How to Apply the National Register Criteria for Evaluation, National Register Bulletin* 15, 2.
[10] *Instructions for Preparing Documentation for Nominating Historical Resources to the California Register of Historical Resources*, ii.

E. Seven Aspects of Integrity

In addition to meeting one or more of the above criteria for the National Register and/or the California Register, a resource must retain its integrity. Integrity is defined as a function of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling and association. A resource need not retain all the aspects of integrity, but it must possess enough of its historic character and/or appearance to be recognizable and to convey the reason for its significance.

F. Petaluma Historic Commercial District Design Guidelines

The project site is within the Petaluma Historic Commercial District and the National Historic Register District for the commercial area of downtown *(see Figure 3).* Development within the Petaluma Historic Commercial District is governed by the Petaluma Historic Commercial District Guidelines. This site was not, however, included as a part of that district. It was not classified as a contributor or non-contributor, and was apparently considered a vacant lot at the time the districts were formed and the design guidelines established. The one resource that was classified as a site in the District was Putnam Plaza, which was constructed in 1987 and as such is not a historic resource.

Dan Peterson's 1977 architectural survey of Petaluma did not include a survey of the 8 Kentucky Street site, but it did mention that it was the previous site of the Cosmopolitan Hotel and that it was currently vacant.[11]

[11] Dan Peterson, 113-114.

4. HISTORIC CONTEXT

A. Urban Context

The area within which the Cosmopolitan Hotel developed was the commercial heart of early Petaluma. Main Street (Petaluma Blvd. North) from beyond Martha Street to B Street represented the commercial core of this thriving community. The area within the Petaluma Historic Commercial District, which encompasses this early commercial strip and the 8 Kentucky Street site, is described as follows in the guidelines for this district:

> *The downtown commercial buildings represent a remarkable architectural tapestry. Characterized by two- and three-story commercial buildings, the downtown area has a rare sampling of commercial architecture representing different styles from the 1870's to the 1950's.*[12]

The document goes on to describe the cast iron storefronts, most of which are located within the block that also includes the 8 Kentucky Street site.

The structures that exist today on the Petaluma Blvd. North side of the block which encompasses the 8 Kentucky Street site are:

- The contemporary building at Petaluma Blvd. North and B Street
- The Gossage/O'Neill Building, 1903
- The McNear Building, 1911
- The McNear Building, 1886
- The MacClay Building, 1918
- The LanMart Building, 1911 (vestiges remain of the original 1876 building)
- The Masonic Building, 1882.

To either side of the 8 Kentucky Street site along Kentucky Street are the back of the McNear Building, and the Gross Building, circa 1930.

B. The Cosmopolitan Hotel/8 Kentucky Street site

1. The Cosmopolitan Hotel

The original building on this site was the Cosmopolitan Hotel, built in 1866. It was called the New York Hotel from 1871 to 1874 *(see Figures 4-8)*. According to historian Adair Heir the Cosmopolitan Hotel was a forty-room workingman's hotel which charged from 35 to 75 cents a room in 1907.[13] J. P. Munro-Fraser's 1880 history of Sonoma County describes the Cosmopolitan Hotel as the first hotel on the site:

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[12] City of Petaluma Planning Department, 4.
[13] Adair Heig, 142.

> *Cosmopolitan Hotel – H. Matthews, proprietor. This hotel was built by George Purdy in January, 1866, and completed on the 19th of the following November. It is situated at the foot of Main street on Lots twenty-eight and twenty-nine, it covering an area of sixty-six feet front by eighty feet depth. It is three stores in height, the first floor consisting of parlor, sitting and dining-rooms besides two others occupied by the family of the proprietor, as well as the kitchen, laundry and a large and commodious bar. The two upper stories are divided into forty-six bed-rooms of considerable size and comfort, all being well furnished. The building was run as a hotel until 1870 by Purdy, after which it fell into the hands of different persons until 1874 when it was purchased by the present proprietor. Board, five to six dollars per week.*[14]

The Hotel was a three-story wood frame building with regularly spaced, single double-hung windows on the second and third floors. These displayed Italianate influences, with heavy hoods supported by corbels above the sash. A balcony with a wood rail was located between the first and second floors. The ground floor featured tall, narrow, paired double-hung windows at the storefronts. The cornice was relatively shallow, supported by paired brackets. The name of the hotel in large letters appeared between the third story windows and the cornice at the top of the parapet wall.

Within the hotel on the ground floor was a cobbler in the northwest corner and a bar and office in the center storefront. There was a barber in the northeast corner, with a baths to the rear of that. Storerooms were located to the rear of the lot along the middle of the east property line. The hotel was addressed as 0, 2 and 8 Main Street in the mid-1880s. At the end of the 1880s it was addressed as 6 and 7 Main Street.

In the 1890s it had a saloon on the west side on the ground floor, and the hotel office in the center. A dining room was located to the rear, with a kitchen and laundry behind that.

At that time the lot itself extended from Main Street (Petaluma Blvd. North) to Kentucky Street, as it does today. A stable was located at the rear of the lot, on the Kentucky Street side, in the southwest corner. A house was located at the southeast corner. It was addressed as 35 Kentucky Street and had a carriage house in the back.

In 1906 the Cosmopolitan Hotel was addressed as 917, 919 and 921 Main Street. On the first floor was a saloon on the west side and a barbershop and cigar store on the east side. To the rear was the dining room. In the back of the lot the structure in the southeast corner was used for storage, and there was still a house located in the southeast corner. It was addressed as 910 Kentucky. By 1910 the addresses for the hotel had again changed, to the contemporary addresses of 27, 29, 31 and 33 Main Street.

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[14] J. P. Munro-Fraser, 349.

2. Gervasoni Building

Some time between 1910 and 1919 the Cosmopolitan Hotel burned down.[15] When the site was rebuilt, it had two one-story, 20-foot-wide storefronts fronting on Main Street, with a two-story storeroom to the rear. These storefronts were brick on the Main Street façade, but internally were separated by a wood frame wall. The storefronts were framed with brick columns to the outside (these still remain), and a brick column with steel reinforcing beam reinforcing the storefronts (personal communication, Rich De Carli). Large dentils embellished the cornice below the parapet.

The storefront to the right featured clerestory windows above the storefront windows; the one to the left had louvers in this same opening. Each storefront had two wire-glass skylights. In 1919 the storefront to the west had a dry goods store, and the storefront to the east was a 5-and-10-center store. The rear portion of the lot was vacant. Above this in the 1952 photograph of the site were two billboards, one above each storefront.

The building configuration described above remained until May 19, 1952, when the structure again burned. At that time the Petaluma Paint Store occupied the east storefront and Guy Mainwairing's furniture store occupied the west storefront. The 1955 issue of the Petaluma Argus-Courier described the furniture store business as follows:

> *Guy Mainwaring came to Petaluma with his father in 1917 and received his first experience in the furniture business with Nielsen Furniture. After working for Breuner's of San Francisco and Oakland, he returned to Petaluma in 1936 and founded Guy's Furniture Store at 33 Main Street. In May of 1952 the building and business were totally destroyed by fire, following which Guy moved in temporarily with the Tibbett's Appliance Store at 23 Main. When Tibbett's closed out, Mainwaring took over the entire firm and stock, converting it to a furniture and appliance business.*[16]

The building burned on May 19, 1952. In the Argus-Courier article on the fire it was described as "one of the largest and most costly that has occurred in Petaluma in many months." At that time, Guy Mainwaring was identified as the owner of Guy's Furniture, and it was said that he was holding a sale in preparation for going out of business. Howard Begum and Larry Park were described as the owners of the Petaluma Paint Company next door. The Gervasoni Finance Company owned the building. The loss of the building was valued at $60,000 and the business loss was $30,000, $15,000 to each business. The cause of the fire was not known.

3. 8 Kentucky Street parking lot

After the fire the lot was used for parking. It was mentioned as a vacant lot in Ed Mannion's Rear View columns in the 1960s and in Adair Heig's *History of Petaluma, A*

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[15] Sanborn Fire Insurance maps for Petaluma, 1910 and 1910 corrected to 1919.
[16] *Petaluma Argus-Courier Centennial Edition*, 6.

California River Town. In the latter it is noted as the location of a key scene in the 1973 movie *American Graffiti* and *Airplane!*

5. FINDINGS

Criterion A (NRHP)
Criterion 1 (CRHR)

The wall remaining on the site at 8 Kentucky Street is the extant wall from the Gervasoni Building (c. 1910 – 1952). The previous building on the site was the Cosmopolitan Hotel.

The Cosmopolitan Hotel represents Petaluma's active period of commercial development and expansion. Its clientele were a class of workers that were a part of Petaluma's early economic prosperity. It is among many that are gone today, most having succumbed to fire. The subsequent Gervasoni Building, although within the historic period of development within that block (roughly 1870s to 1930s), was not the building for which the site was known. It was a more modest one-story commercial storefront that housed, over the course of its history, a dry goods store, a 5 & 10 cent variety store, a paint store, furniture store, and appliance store. The later activity for which the site is known is as the setting for a scene in the film American Graffiti, although this did not occur within the historic period. The remaining wall is part of this later building. It is not part of the structure for which the site is historically known.

Criterion B (NRHP)
Criterion 2 (CRHR)

The site is not associated with any significant historic figures in Petaluma's history. The Cosmopolitan Hotel was developed by George Purdy. The Gervasoni Building was owned by the Gervasoni Finance Company. A number of local businesses occupied the site over time, none of which were strongly associated with it. Additionally, the site does not have the appearance that it did during its historic period, which obviates its association with any early historical figures.

Criterion C (NRHP)
Criterion 3 (CRHR)

The site does not embody the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction. The property also does not represent the work of a master, possess high artistic values, nor represent a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction. The remaining wall of the Gervasoni Building is characteristic of the materials and construction methods found in many buildings in Petaluma during the equivalent time period.

Criterion D (NRHP)
Criterion 4 (CRHR)

The site at 8 Kentucky Street, including the ruin of the wall of the Gervasoni Building, contains remnants from Petaluma's earlier commercial period. It is a visual representation of an earlier historical period that provides information about our past, which is documented in this Historic Resource Report.

Aspects of Integrity:

Location:	The wall and site is located in its original location.
Design:	The wall is representative of the construction methods and design of the circa 1910 Gervasoni Building.
Setting:	The setting of the site from its historic period is extant and intact.
Materials:	The materials of the site and Gervasoni Building are extant and intact. No visible representation remains of the earlier Cosmopolitan Hotel.
Workmanship:	The workmanship of the extant wall of the Gervasoni Building is visible. It is typical of the period.
Feeling:	As a ruin of the original Gervasoni Building, the remaining rear wall is a visual reminder of that building. The earlier site included portions of the front façade, since removed. The site today does not have any visible reminders of the original Cosmopolitan Hotel.
Association:	The ruin of the Gervasoni Building is associated with the second building on that site. It retains its association with the period of commercial development in Petaluma, but not its association with the most significant structure on that site, which was the Cosmopolitan Hotel.

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Drawings & Maps

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Historic photographs courtesy The Petaluma Museum and the Sonoma County Library, as noted.

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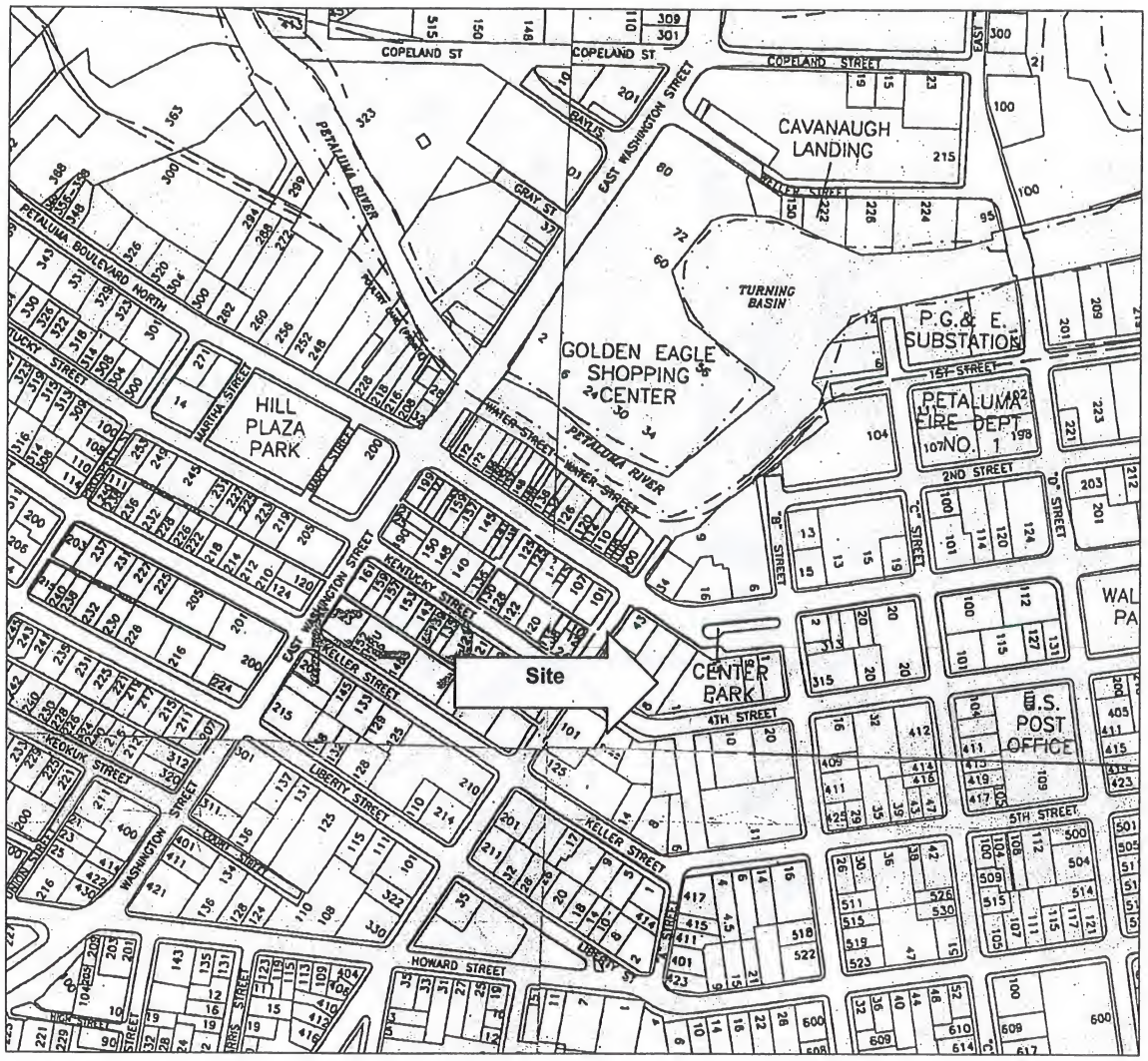


Figure 1: Project Location Map

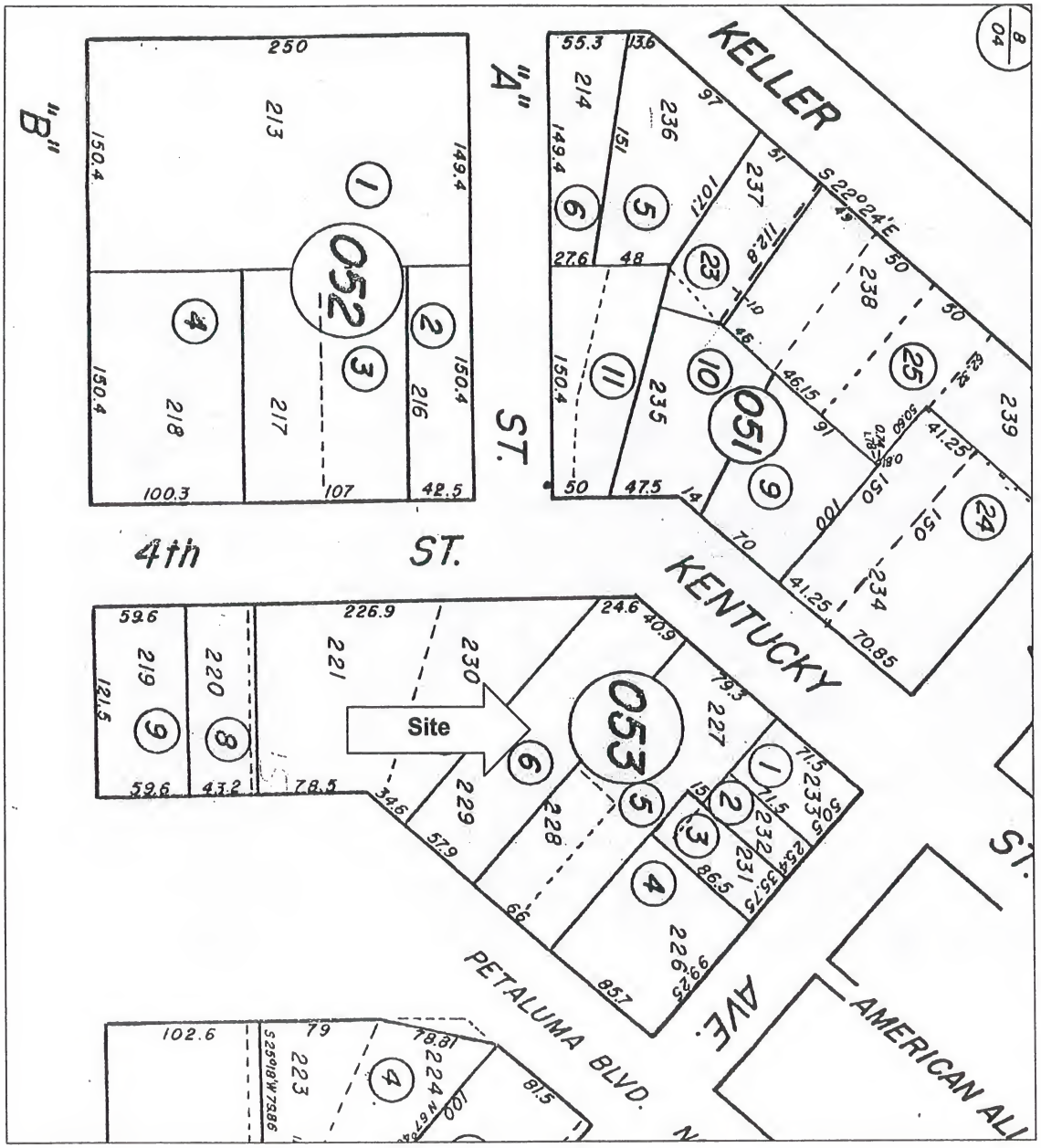


Figure 2: Parcel Map

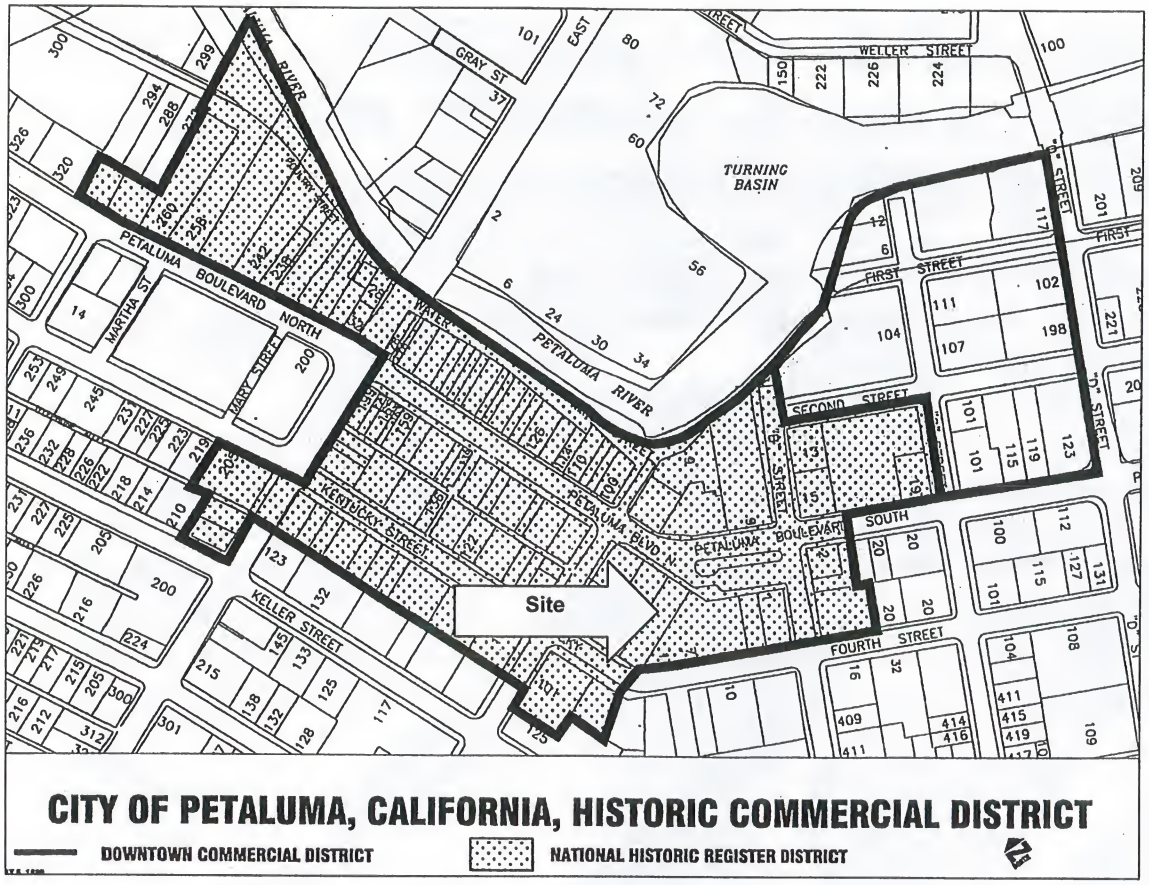


Figure 3: Petaluma Historic Commercial District

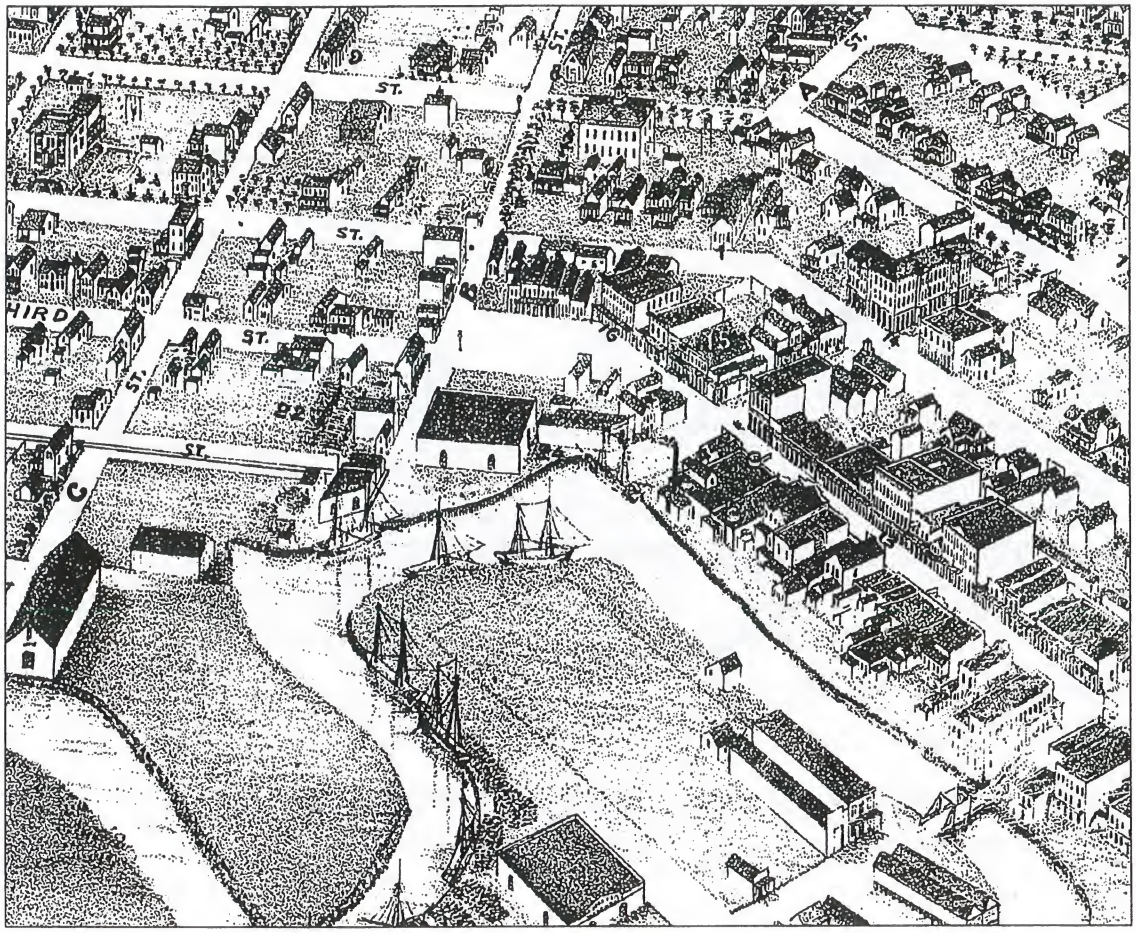


Figure 4: New York Hotel, 1871 Bird's-Eye View of Petaluma

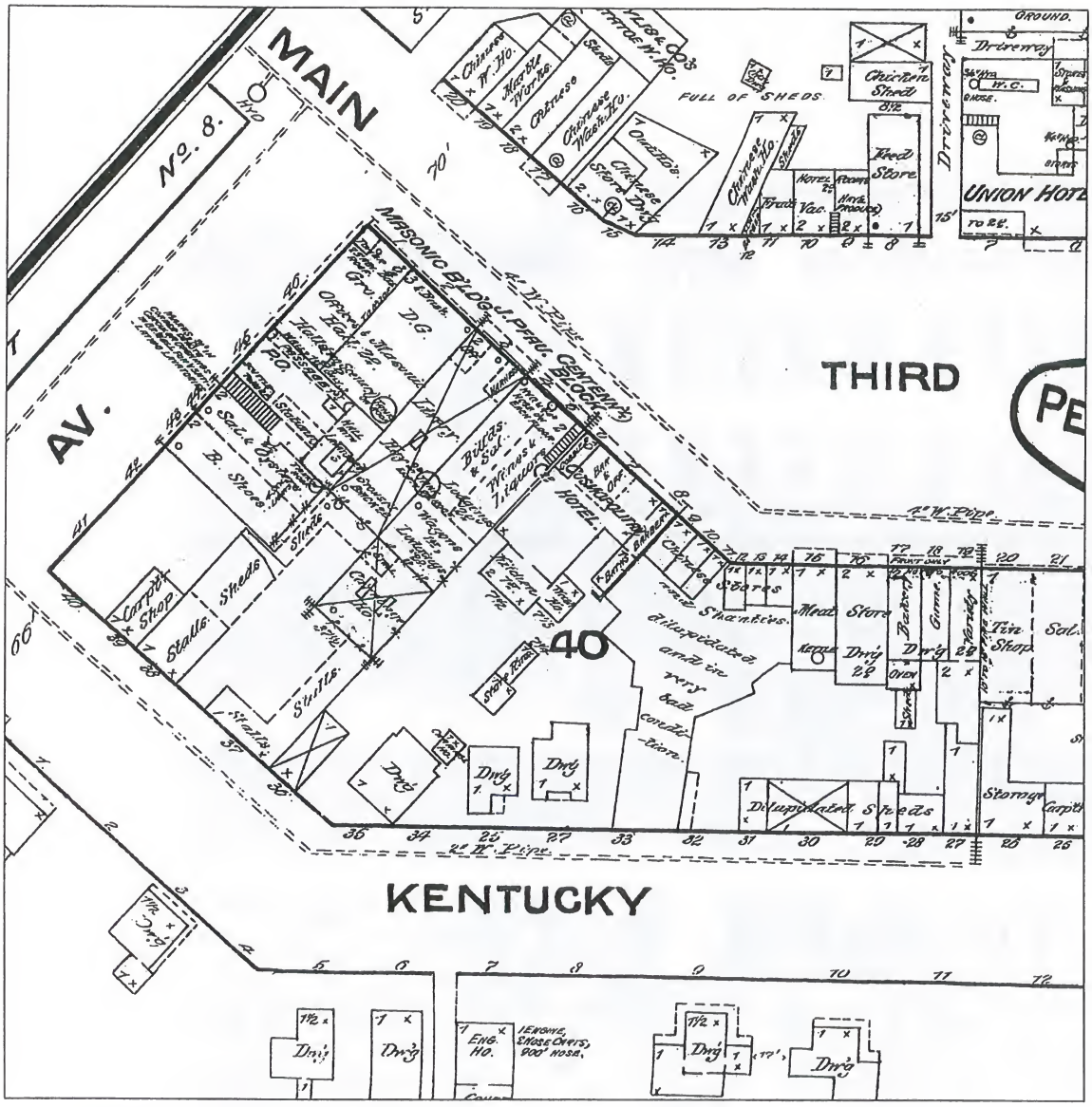


Figure 5: 1883 Sanborn map showing Cosmopolitan Hotel

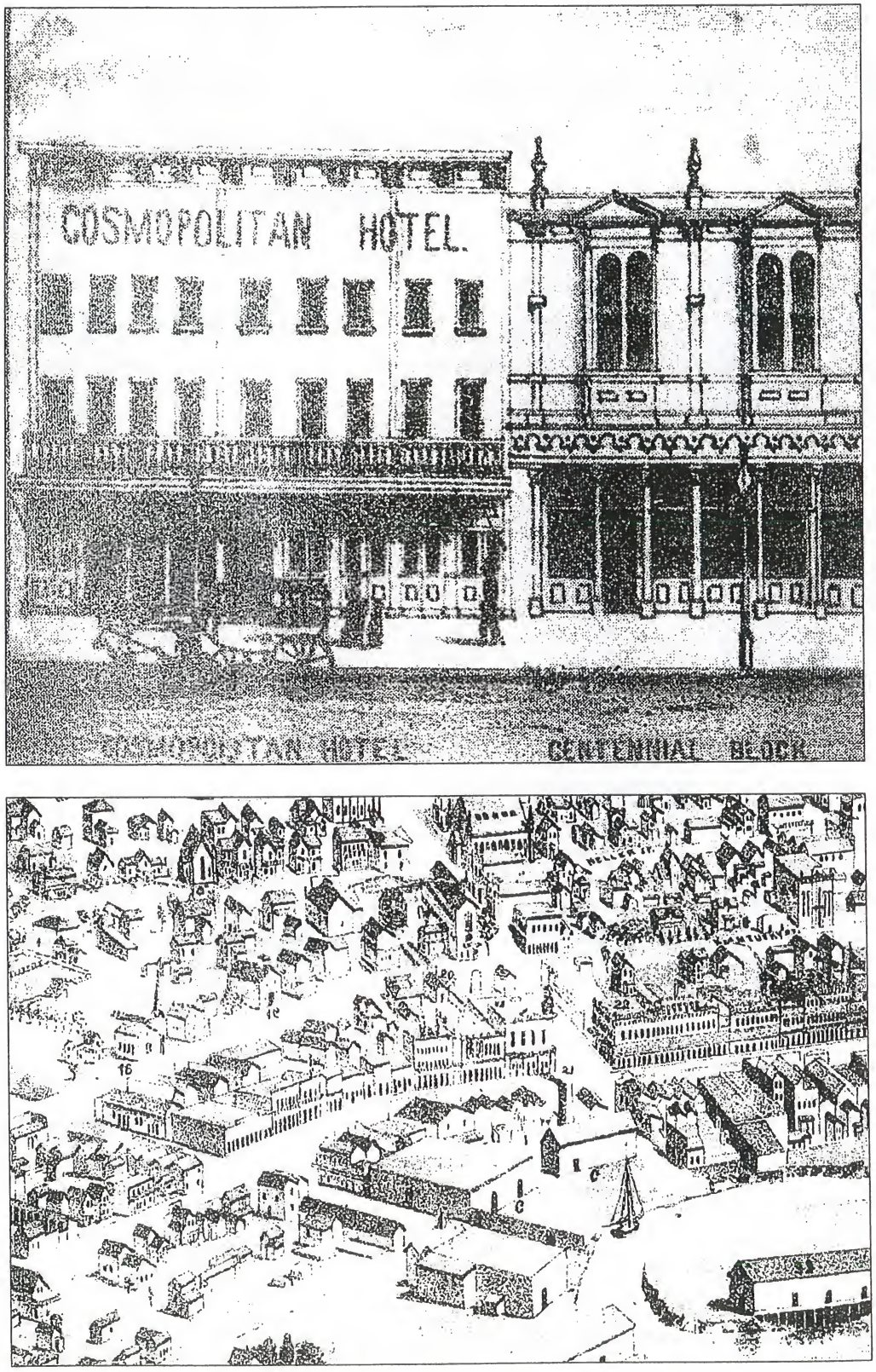
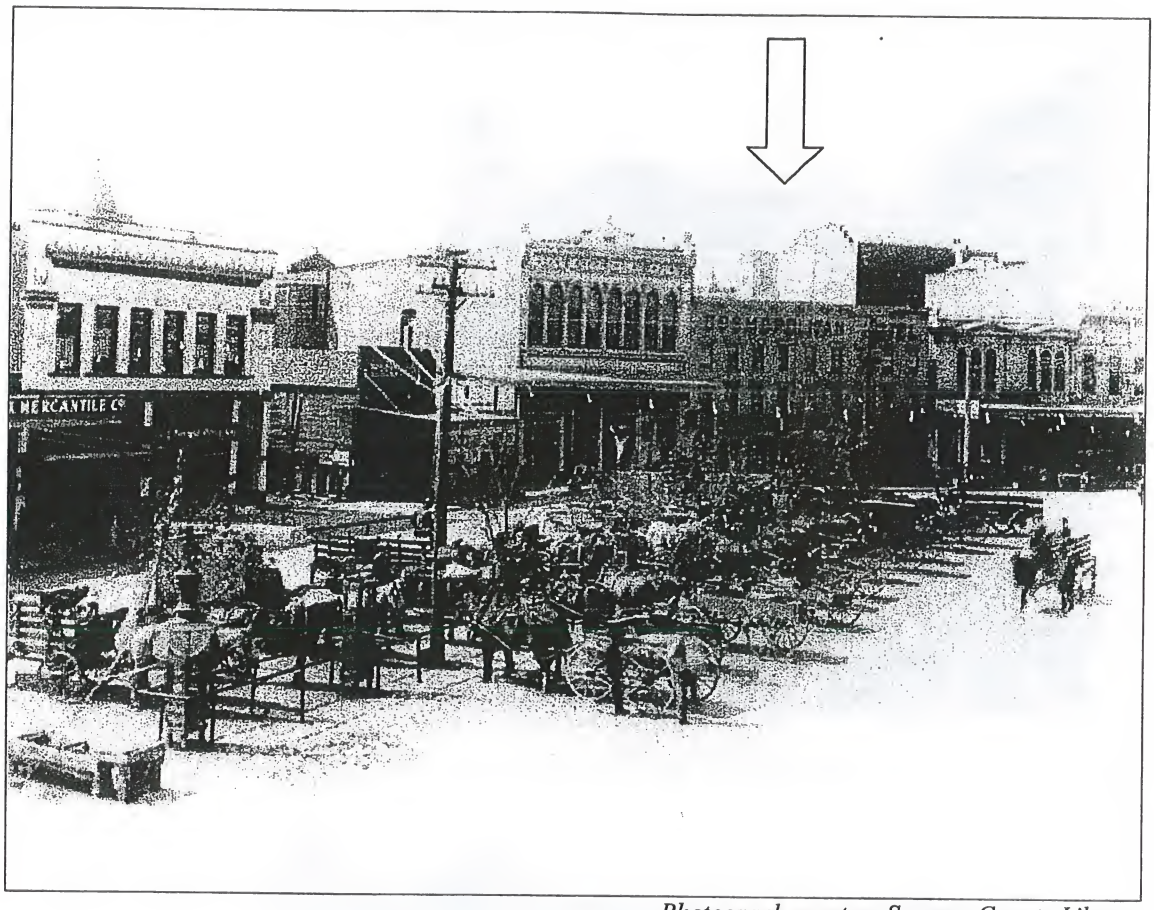
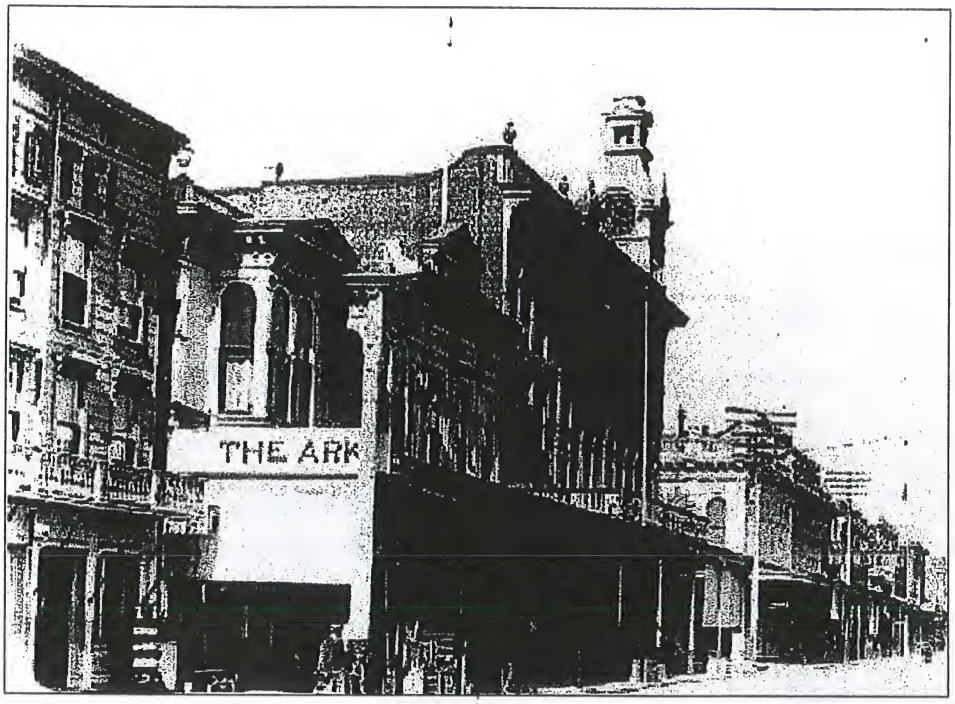


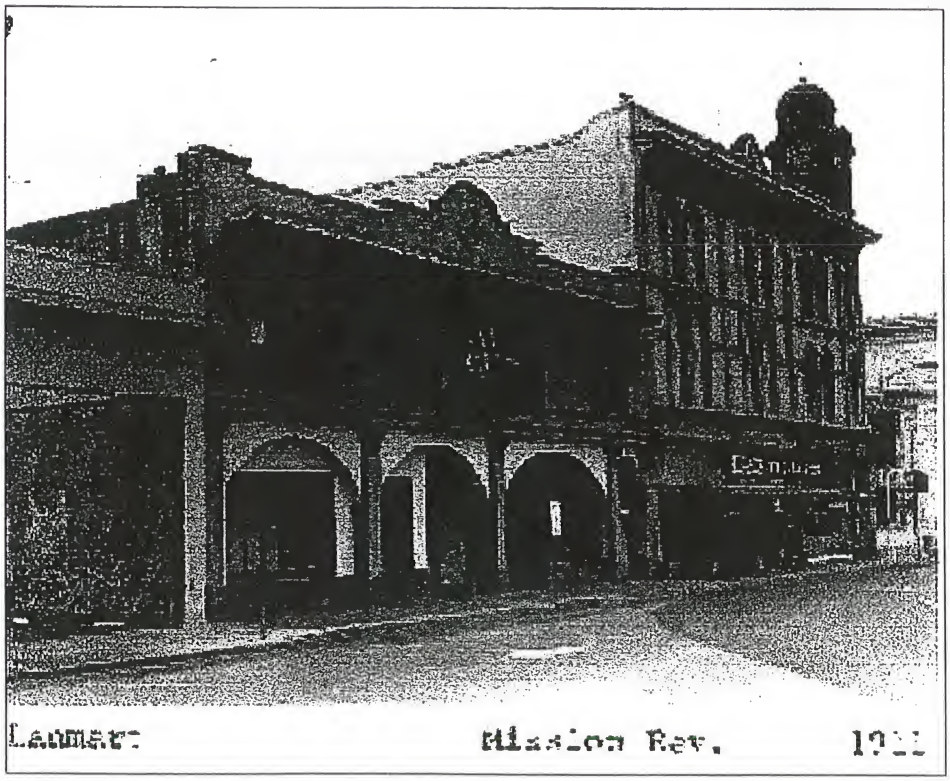
Figure 6: Elevation and bird's-eye view of Cosmopolitan Hotel from 1884



Photograph courtesy Sonoma County Library

Figure 7: Historic view of Cosmopolitan Hotel

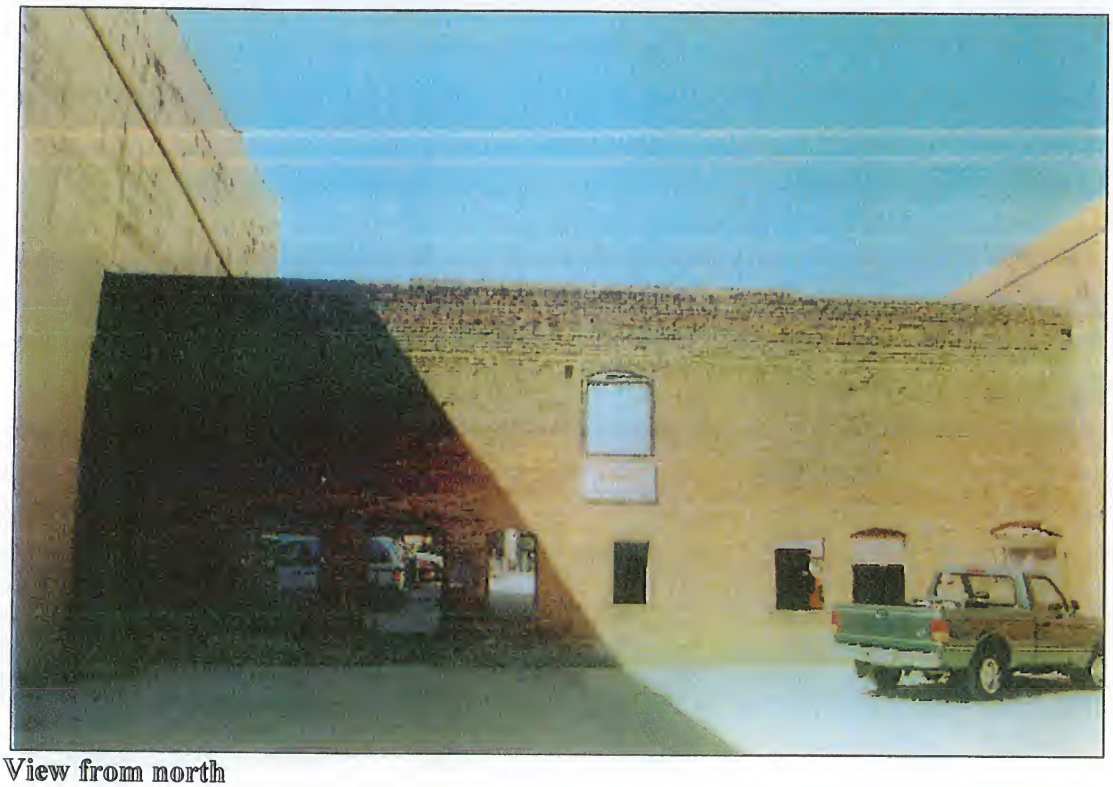




Photos courtesy Sonoma County Library

Figure 8: Views of site from circa 1900 and 1977

Figure 8a: Cosmopolitan Hotel site ca 1940



View from north

View from south

Figure 9: Views of remaining rear wall of Gervasoni Building

Window detail

Door detail, west side

Figure 10: Details of remaining wall from Gervasoni Building

Figure 11: Views of site from northeast and northwest

Figure 12: View of site from southeast